The Fundamental Role Played by Unionism in the Self-Structuring of Professional Journalists from Québec

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Abstract: This article focuses on journalists’ unions in Québec. It illustrates the main role they played in the self-structuring of professional journalists and the construction of a collective and public identity. It details the challenge posed by the Internet to journalists and their unions. To that effect, it digs into history and revisits different key moments, documents, and discourses of self-recognition and public affirmation of the group. That history is looked at in relation to an “event,” the introduction of the Internet, which forced the unions to deal with the potentially disrupting effects of the new practices being developed.


Keywords: Journalism history; Unionism

The configuration of Québec journalism that emerged in the twentieth century was characterized by the development of professional journalists as a self-organized group, resting mainly on the social mechanism of unionism. This particular configuration—with its rules of the game, its coalitions and power relations between the actors—was relatively stable until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the general context—economic, cultural, technological, and political—registered drastic changes. This article examines workers’ solidarity

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and collective action for social recognition and upward mobility in the particular context of Québec. It focuses on the link between unionism and the collective identity of Québec journalists that emerged in the late 1960s.

The article begins with a short review of the main components of a societal configuration, as defined by Norbert Elias. It next provides a recounting, drawing on archival sources, of the successive attempts by journalists to organize themselves, until they reached success in the early 1970s. It then lists the main themes of the public argumentation used by the group, presenting the way its union component is coping with the shockwave of the Internet. Finally, it discusses the implications of the crumbling of some of the discursive strategies that made organizing possible and lists the more general challenges that face the group.

**The configuration of the twentieth century**

In an effort to surpass the traditional sociological opposition between society and the individual, the Anglo-German sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990) developed the concept of “configuration” as a way of focusing on the interdependencies between individuals and organizations in a given society. A configuration models the state of those relations, which remain stable for a given period. He also posited that those relations could be described as following the rules of a particular sport or game (Elias, 1981). Depending on the level being considered, the social actors, or players in the game, may be individuals or groups, but the key point is their dependency on one another and the accepted/forbidden ways of action in a given time.

Applied to journalistic activity, the mapping of the concerned groups of actors can be generally listed as:

1. the owners, or managers, of the media that carry journalistic content;
2. the sources, or social actors, that provide the main material for the stories that constitute journalistic information;
3. the publics for whom this information is produced, including the “lector in fabula” as imagined by the producer, “civil society” or organized publics, analysts and other scientific observers, and ultimately all the other groups of actors affected by or interested in the information;
4. the regulators, including members of the judiciary (lawyers and judges), the state (CRTC, government offices, etc.), or of the self-regulating organizations (media associations, press council, etc.);
5. the information itself as a product offered to the divergent analyses and interpretations by all the actors, including occasional “foreigners” who are unfamiliar with or operate outside of that particular game or national configuration;
6. the actual producers of journalistic information, or the workers and craftsmen, including professional journalists, would-be-professional journalists, and amateurs.
Different rules governing interdependent relations have resulted from different historical relations among the actors. For example, the journalistic configuration in the United States has long been dominated by the media corporation (Hernandez-Ramirez, 2005). In Brazil, by contrast, it has been driven by the state (Le Cam & Ruellan, 2004), while in France it is the legacy of political circumstances (the Front populaire in the 1930s and the immediate postwar revival of the media industry).

The hypothesis concerning the journalistic milieu in Québec is that unionism has played a major role in the journalistic configuration since the end of the nineteenth century. Unions were the main actors in the self-structuring of the group. More specifically, we argue that journalists have built a professional group and defined a territory (vague and unstable though this may be) by constructing their own identity. The group survives by constant definition and defence of its identity, which is the result of historical discursive production (Le Cam, 2005).

We define identity as the collective production of public discourses by the institutions of journalists: professional associations, unions, or press councils. The word “professional” is used here in its most common sense, designating a specialized and skilled activity generally exercised by employees rather than individual entrepreneurs. We could also have used this word in two other senses that are also related to social recognition and benefits. The first expresses the historical recognition in Western societies of a special status and legal rights for “liberal” professions such as medicine and law. In fact, we will use it in that sense when listing the main themes of the discursive production of the group. The second meaning is embedded in the corporatist ideology that systematically links a group of specialized workers to a direct recognition by and dialogue with the state. One could argue with credibility that these two additional meanings of the word “professional” were present in the intellectual context, and even mixed with unionism, at the time of the self-structuring of journalists from Québec. But for the purposes of this article, we chose to concentrate on the driving force of unionism and its historical role in the self-structuring of Québec journalists.

Let’s now review briefly the main moments and features that created the specific professional identity and the particular configuration of Québec journalism.

A specific history
One of the first professional associations for journalists in the province of Québec, the Association des journalistes canadiens-français, created in 1903, has never been clearly labelled. In one text, it is qualified both as an “association” and a “young trade-union” (Denault, 1905, p. 297), whereas another document by the same author talks about it as a union and a professional organization (Denault, 1905). The association was clearly created to focus on the promotion of the French language, to unite the French forces of America with respect to religion, and to promote professional claims (Héroux & Côté, 1903). On March 2, 1905, the association obtained, by provincial decree, the status of trade union for professional and mutual assistance. The founders wanted to protect their members when acting as professionals and to give them all the usual benefits of mutual assistance
These were the first steps toward a collective self-representation of journalists in Québec, but only the first steps. The association disappeared gradually from the public sphere and public documents in the 1920s.

In fact, the rise of a collective identity revealed itself in direct dependency to Québec’s industrial-relations system, which developed slowly in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1924, legislation known as La loi des syndicats professionnels gave a juridical personality to trade unions and recognized the legality of collective agreements (Déom, 1989; Roback, 1996). Another law, passed in 1934, extended the protection of trade unions and their collective agreements and gave them the capacity to increase wages (Roback, 1996). Journalism was part of the movement. In 1920, l’Union des journalistes de Montréal, which gathered 70 French- and English-speaking journalists, was created and affiliated with the International Typographical Union of North America (Demers, 1989a). This organization ceased to be active two years later. The first formal union of French-Canadian journalists appeared at Le Droit in Ottawa, created just after the foundation of the Canadian Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL). But this survived for only a short period, from 1921 to 1929 (Demers, 1989a). In fact, few attempts to organize journalists occurred before the Second World War. Journalists at that time were employed by family press companies and worked under the protection of printing workers’ unions affiliated with the CCCL (Demers, 1989a).

Labour relations legislation passed in 1944 was extremely important for trade unionism, in that it made possible the legal recognition of unions and compelled employers to negotiate with accredited unions, which become the “collective agent” for employees (Roback, 1996). This law really opened the door to unions of journalists. On March 8, 1944, the Syndicat de l’industrie du journal, in which journalists were a minority, was authorized at La Presse; in 1945, the Syndicat des journalistes de Québec was recognized, and journalists from La Presse were able to join the Syndicat de l’industrie (Demers, 1989a).

Up to the 1960s, the number of unions and their members increased regularly. The craft unions were replaced by industrial unions, which gathered various occupations. Catholic unionism grew, and the union movement became a social phenomenon. Unions wanted the state to intervene, and they tried political action (Rouillard, 1989). A number of major strikes occurred, including the Asbestos Strike in 1949 and the dispute at the Murdochville mines in 1957. At the beginning of the 1960s, unionism tended to be radicalized (Rouillard, 1989).

In this context, French-Canadian journalists’ unions developed a set of goals: the organization of a national (in other words, French-Canadian) journalistic federation, the creation of journalism as a profession, the development of formal programs in journalism education, a legally recognized press card, and so on (Robillard, 1951). In 1954, around those themes, they created l’Union canadienne des journalistes de langue française (UCJLF). This gathering of French-speaking journalists—the term “French-Canadian” had disappeared—was launched to complete the unions’ actions by setting up “a unit of thought and efforts through the nation” and by promoting mutual aid, collective defence, and common
progress (Morin, 1955, p. 1). The UCJLF was built like a union federation, with delegates from local unions in Ottawa, Trois-Rivières, Québec, and Montréal (Mission itinérante, 1968). The founders promoted protection of journalistic territory by adopting the term “professional,” and they hoped that their organization would manage relations between the public and public authorities (UCJLF, 1961). They wanted to represent all the profession. They pleaded for journalists to be recognized as professionals and, at the same time, to be part of the “effort of affirmation of the French-Canadian people” (Morin, 1955, p.1). In its early years, the UCJLF sought to stand up for journalistic freedoms, to claim rights for the French language in the Canadian confederation, and to build a school of journalism in partnership with the University of Montréal (Morin, 1955).

The UCJLF tried to influence the evolution of social recognition of journalism by presenting a bill to Prime Minister Jean Lesage. The document proposed that the province recognize the group’s professional claims. It also called for the creation of education in journalism, the establishment of a press council, and the drafting of a code of ethics (UCJLF, 1960). With this public intervention, they hoped for a legal acknowledgment of their status. But the effort did not result in legislation. The UCJLF adopted a code of ethics in 1963, entitled *Charte de l’intégrité professionnelle*.

At the same time, the UCJLF opened its membership to non-unionized journalists, and it invited publicists and public-relations workers to join as associate members (UCJLF, 1961). This meant that the “Union” gave up its unionist character in 1961; membership was no longer based on trade union membership, but on individual choice (Demers, 1989a). This was done for the proposition to change the organization clearly toward a more professional—in the corporatist and liberal senses alluded to in the introduction—activity, expressed in the new constitution in 1962 (UCJLF, 1962). In the following years, the UCJLF continued to press for the same goals as before, including a press card, a press council, and recognition as a profession.

**Constitution of the formal group of journalists**

Several claims were satisfied during collective negotiations at *La Presse* (1951), *Le Soleil* (1952), and *Le Devoir* (1954): wage increases, reinforcement of job security, clauses of an individual nature (relating to bylines and royalties) and of a collective nature, such as protection of employment and criteria for recruiting (Déom, 1989). Negotiations occurred locally, newspaper by newspaper. In the 1960s, a profound transformation occurred among journalist unions and the union movement as a whole in favour of the Quiet Revolution and the social changes it brought to the province.

Trade unions, traditionally gathered in the CCCL, moved away from Catholicism and changed the name of the federation to the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU, or CSN in French), which brought together unions from various sectors of the economy, and in particular from media companies. Claims of journalists as workers tended to become more radical, resulting in some long
The term “journalist” even seems to have been replaced by “information worker” (Godin, 1981, p. 139).

A strike at La Presse in 1958 about an internal problem with the status of a union officer; the historic Radio-Canada strike in 1959, which revealed extreme tensions between managers and journalists; the dispute at La Presse in 1961 where journalists claimed independence in the newsroom (Saint-Jean, 1993); the conflict in 1964 for freedom of opinion in the face of the ideological orientation of La Presse (Déom, 1989); the fight for journalistic freedom at Le Soleil during the day called Le Samedi de la matraque in 1964 (Fradet, 2001)—all these conflicts had results for journalists: contract clauses about owners’ responsibilities and protection of journalistic functions. These gains at the province’s big media become touchstones for other employees in Québec. The mobilization of Québec journalists was reinforced by the growing concentration of media ownership in the 1960s and with the creation by Pierre Péladeau, businessman and owner of a few periodical newspapers, of a new daily newspaper, Le Journal de Montréal, during the 1964 strike at La Presse. These conflicts also led to the foundation, in 1964, of a new unionist gathering called l’Alliance canadienne des syndicats de journalistes (ACSJ), created to play a central role between unions themselves and to publicly represent unionists (Mission itinérante, 1968), a role that was no longer being filled by the UCJLF.

At the end of the decade, a broad action was undertaken by the ACSJ, the UCJLF, and some journalists to abolish the dispersion of professional representation. But instead, it ended up reproducing that dispersion. The move successively created the following: a professional federation in 1969 (La fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, FPJQ); a unionist federation of workers in the communication industry in 1972 (La fédération nationale des communications, FNC); and a press council in 1973 (Le Conseil de presse du Québec, CPQ). The FPJQ deals with professional preoccupations, the FNC is a federation of the CNTU, and the press council stands up for journalists and media morals. These three organizations, still in existence in 2006, have produced many public discourses during the past 40 years. An examination of these discourses reveals several discursive strategies (Le Cam, 2005).

**Discursive strategies**

In spite of the organizational dispersion of efforts since the end of the nineteenth century, the group of Québec journalists, with the organizations that have been created, has succeeded in one thing: the construction of its own specificity. The journalist’s identity can be defined by specific conceptions of news information, ethics, and expertise. These three characteristics are shared by journalists elsewhere in Canada or in Europe, but four discursive strategies are fundamental components of a specific Québec professional identity: the group’s participation in the construction of the French-Canadian (later, Québec) nation; a corporatist inclination; a constant duality between professional and unionist conceptions of the journalistic occupation; and a tendency toward self-organization (Le Cam, 2005).
These four strategies were employed throughout the twentieth century. As a group, journalists sought to be part of the political evolution of the province. The group promoted the national ideal at the beginning of the twentieth century (with French-Canadian nationalism and Henri Bourassa’s nationalist group) as well as during the Quiet Revolution. It has always encouraged protection of the French language and has sometimes produced public discourses about social change. For itself, the group has always publicly expressed a desire for journalism to be recognized as a profession, in the sense of liberal professions, and for journalists to be recognized as professional workers. However, this last idea has always been subject to dispute: those playing a major role in professional organizations have tended to promote it, while ordinary members of the organizations wanted to keep the journalistic occupation as free and open to newcomers as can be. This tension about creating a profession is illustrated by the institutional duality: specifically, the division between professional and unionist partisans. This tension is a fundamental characteristic of the Québec journalistic group. It plays a major role in the constitution of an identity and can explain the pattern of self-organization within the group. In fact, while multiplying journalistic organizations, the group has produced journalistic institutions that invite the group to manage its problems by itself. The three key organizations compete for the role of major public agent for journalists, and they often neutralize themselves and each other by acting on the same field. But they converge to oppose the attempts toward the legal framing of territory, status, and expert appraisement.

Identity and the Internet
The discursive strategies of the Québec group of journalists are revealed by analysis of journalistic documents and by observation of the introduction of the Internet into the journalistic milieu. The arrival of the Internet poses a challenge to professional journalists as a group in Québec. By bringing into question the very terms “journalist” and “journalism,” and by undermining the image of journalists, the Internet weakens the professional journalistic group identity and its historical specificity (Le Cam, 2005).

With the introduction of the Internet, traditional media companies began to employ new workers to write online information. Simultaneously, some new publishers appeared online with webzines and weblogs that specialize in current events (Jeanne-Perrier, Le Cam, & Pélissier, 2005). The media, the unions, the professional federation, the press council, individual journalists, and the newcomers reacted in various ways. Traditional journalists developed, in their journalistic product, various representations of the newcomers, in their media and outside, as amateurs. Collective journalistic organizations reacted progressively. The FPJQ gave its professional card to applicants who could prove they had a relationship with a traditional medium, or, should the occasion arise, to those whose work could be assimilated into traditional journalism. Overall, the FPJQ reacted positively to online journalism when it was clearly related to traditional journalism (FPJQ, 2001). In the same way, the press council declared in 2001 that it was going to examine complaints about online journalism, considering it as a
part of traditional journalism (Conseil de presse, 2002). In the same declaration, it also warned about the “abusive use” of hypertext in online journalism writing, a position that made online journalists feel misunderstood. For its part, the union federation, the FNC, sought to ensure that all journalistic work, online or otherwise, would continue to remain in the local unions’ jurisdiction (FNC, 2001). Accordingly, the FNC supported local unions in two major claims: trade-union jurisdiction and royalties, working for the respect of professional criteria by online employees and for the collective agreement (FNC, 2001). In sum, the three organizations reacted by gathering the newcomers under their purview.

In traditional media, the first online employees were mostly webmasters, data processing specialists, or journalists who were impassioned advocates of new technologies at places like Le Devoir, Le Soleil, or Radio-Canada (Le Cam, 2001). Local unions have progressively confronted owners over the question of how to protect the journalistic labour market. In 2000, journalists from Le Journal de Québec and Le Journal de Montréal fought with their employers to maintain online work as a function of the newsroom; online product had to be produced by journalists (Duchesne, 2000). In another context, online employees at Radio-Canada have faced tensions with TV and radio journalists because they had to work with content that had already been produced for other media (SRC, 2002). At the beginning of radio-canada.ca, the online work could be performed by a technician. But as the website grew and online workers found themselves rewriting information coming from the news agency, journalists became necessary. Online employees finally obtained the status of journalists in 2002. They wanted to create a specific bargaining unit, whereas the union of journalists at Radio-Canada was opposed to it. The union idea was victorious, and online employees were grouped with its other radio and TV members (SRC, 2002). All journalists, traditional or online, now must follow the internal handbook on journalistic standards (SRC, 2002).

Some other media also had to clarify the situation. For example, Gesca and the union of journalists at La Presse agreed to unionize online employees in 2001. Online employees are gathered in a specific union section and have lower wages and benefits than traditional journalists (Dutrisac, 2001). In the same period, online employees of Canoë (the portal of Quebecor) did not succeed in their unionizing initiative. In 2000, 95% of online employees of Canoë and Le Journal de Montréal had voted to join the union at Le Journal de Montréal, but the process faced several problems and was stopped (Marsan, 2000). At TVA (the television network of Quebecor), online employees have been recognized as journalists and have joined the internal union of journalists, but they don’t have the same status as TV journalists (TVA, 2002).

These examples of the unionization process of online journalists show the central role played by local unions. They present themselves to the employers as the collective voice of workers. The FNC, the federation associated with this movement, takes the position that as professionals, journalists must protect their work (FNC, 2001) as well as their prerogatives related to their status. So far the
unions have not reacted to the emergence of blogging in the public sphere. In fact, the weblogs created by the mainstream media, which are increasing in number, are usually incorporated into the main website and are perceived as another service to Internet users.

Although the introduction of the Internet into the journalistic milieu has raised questions about journalistic identity within the major media and about the role of unions of journalists, it has also augmented the dispersion of journalistic work outside the traditional media. Unions faced an internal debate about what kind of status online employees should have. They also had to confront newcomers who called into question the very definition of the journalist. In Québec, an examination of the definition of the journalist reveals a fundamental characteristic of their status: the journalist’s link with a particular medium. Without this link, would-be journalists can hardly define themselves as such. Even freelance journalists define themselves by referring to the work done for a specific medium. But some online workers have found a way to publish outside existing media organizations; they publish their opinions on their own websites or Web journals and focus on alternative information, playing a journalistic role in the public sphere. Unions of journalists in Québec did not react to this trend, partly because in the province the “amateurization” phenomenon has stayed more a potential menace than a reality, and partly because the practice of blogging is gradually being integrated into the traditional media as a professional activity.

The weakening of discursive strategies

The most important thing revealed by the study of online journalism’s impact on the journalistic milieu is a weakening of some of the discursive strategies historically produced by Québec group of journalists. This analysis has shown four main strategies: one concerns the group’s participation in the construction of the French-Canadian, later Québec, nation; another is the corporatist inclination; a third is the constant duality between professional and unionist conceptions of journalistic occupation; and the fourth is the tendency toward self-organization.

Since the 1990s, journalistic organizations have intervened less and less in debates on the construction or defence of the Québec nation. The political context of globalization, the extension of an economic North American partnership with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the failure of the 1980 and 1995 referendums on the sovereignty of Québec have all influenced journalistic concerns and priorities. A look at the organizations’ public discourses brings to the fore a discursive change: the FPJQ and the press council worry more and more about international concerns, including the role of the press in democratization, the importance of freedom of the press, and the right to public expression in the world (Le Cam, 2005).

The drive toward professionalization reached a clear stop at the beginning of the 2000s with the rejection by the FPJQ’s general assembly of an internal proposal for a future bill about the creation of a legal professional status for journalists. The general assembly of the FPJQ clearly refused this way of further constructing their group. As to the central theme of ownership concentration,
which played a role in the creation of the FPJQ and the press council (Demers & Le Cam, 2004), it started losing its argumentative power in the early 1990s (Demers, 1991) and was all but abandoned by journalists during the wave of selling and buying at the turn of the new century.

Finally, the discursive strategy based on the duality between professional and unionist conceptions is in decline. Unionism is changing. Obviously each union of journalists still has a major role in coping with changes at the local level, but some researchers talk about a crisis of Québec unionism, which has historically been defined as a movement and not as a sum of groups. Now, trade unionism is increasingly being seen as a service machine. It must face global economic challenges that put trade unions in a defensive position in the face of rising social inequalities and the division of labour. Québec unionism seems to have lost its role of disputant and countervailing power (Gagnon, 1994).

Considering journalism, the FNC has been publicly silent about contemporary problems. The organization’s website shows a fading preoccupation with journalism and its public debates, leaving the public playing field to the FPJQ. In fact, in the early 1990s, starting with the retirement of its long-time president Maurice Amram (“La FNC en crise,” 1991), the FNC abandoned its 20-year claim to be a rightful public representative of professional journalists. Concerning its journalist members, it has withdrawn to a position of strictly sustaining local negotiations to keep specific standards, status, and territory, as it does with its other types of workers. In a parallel move, at the end of 1991, the FPJQ cut its structural link with the unions by transforming itself from an assembly of organizations (mainly local unions) to an assembly of individuals (“La FPJQ change de statut,” 1991-92), a move similar to the one taken by the UCJLF in 1962. The change was initiated in September 1991 by the board of directors and approved by the general assembly in December. This was done almost without debate and was the object of an informal agreement with the directors of the FNC. In fact, the transition formula kept the balance tipped in favour of the FPJQ, since members who had been registered through their unions would stay listed as FPJQ members unless they personally requested otherwise.

Although the membership of both organizations is still rising (up to 7,000 for the FNC and more than 1,700 for the FPJQ), their dependency on the same large local unions continues to be a central feature. The FNC has clearly opened its doors to other groups of workers in the communication industry, but its core membership is composed of workers at the traditional “big” media. On its side, the FPJQ is still dominated by its main founder groups, the unions at the daily newspapers and the generalist television networks, principally Radio-Canada—the same unions on which the FNC relies—which are part of a mature sector of journalistic activity and the media industry.

**A challenged configuration**

One could conclude that Québec’s journalistic configuration remains basically the same now as in the previous century. But there are signs of change.
Starting with the journalists, we have already noted that their unions are linked to the “traditional” or mainstream media, which are losing ground. Newspaper readership began to slide in the early 1980s, and audiences for the big network broadcasters (Radio-Canada, CBC, TVA, CTV, etc.) have been going in the same direction since the 1990s. In fact, the social need for journalistic information is increasingly being met by so-called new media such as all-news television and radio outlets (both national and international), free urban dailies, and the Internet. These businesses are almost non-unionized, and their production chain is structured in such a way that it is almost impossible for traditional unions to organize these their workers. The FNC appears to be terribly conscious of the challenge represented by new media and the changes in the labour market, and has been supporting for many years now the Association des journalistes indépendants (AJIQ), the province’s only union of freelancers.

The decline of the “traditional” media also authorizes their owners to implement a new workplace model, the “good employee model” (Demers, 1989b) to replace their journalists’ “traditional” ethics of professional non-involvement. By increasing the emotional ties of workers to their employer, this model impedes strong alliances with journalists in competing media. In addition, the fragile situation of the traditional media makes it almost inevitable that they be included in big-media empires or trusts, and that they lose their editorial independence, real or desired. The editorial policies of the traditional media have been pushed more and more in the direction of the formulas developed by the “popular press”: short stories focusing on crime and violence, sensationalism, gossip, infotainment, and so on (Merrill, 1968). The only mass public left is the popular public, while elites and the upper middle class are moving toward satellite televisions and elite transnational publications. As a result, the unions of journalists, stuck mainly in the traditional media on a national geographical basis, are losing their alliance with the so-called quality public.

At the same time, new technology has extended journalistic expertise to non-traditional actors who can offer journalistic products and claim new status as information producers. Traditional journalists, their unions, and the mainstream media are gradually being pushed away from the centre of the definition of “informational” territory. Online journalism and weblogs are the main challengers, partly because they have made possible a sort of “mass amateurization” of publishing (Shirky, 2002). Because of its vagueness and its assimilation by the public as a form of alternative expression, this mass amateurization does not need unions and unionism to structure and defend its practices or its territory. Information is now being provided by a larger number and wider variety of producers, and especially by the public and by other sources. This assimilation of Internet information is changing the public status of producers of journalistic information. But online journalism is not the only example: the extension of informational territory can also be witnessed in the free urban newspapers, consumer magazines, and so on. For example, the majority of information sources were once supportive of the role of the mass media as the public marketplace of ideas, and claimed from those
media and their journalists a right of access. Now, these same sources have given
birth to parallel media in an effort to reach audiences directly (Lavigne, 2005).
On their side, the regulators—the CRTC, the state through its own media, the
courts in a secondary way—all formally supported more vigorously than they do
now the equilibrating role played by organized journalists, as providers of a plu-
rality of points of view, independent critics, seekers of hidden information, et
etera. Now, we have seen the permissiveness of the Canadian Radio-television
and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in the face of the convergence
wave of the early twenty-first century even though concentration of media owner-
ship was still denounced by journalists (and others) as a major threat to the quality
of public information. The public discourse on the dangers of media consolidation
was central to the recent Senate report on the media (Sénat du Canada, 2006) and
in public expressions by the FPJQ of concerns about the consequences of a fore-
casted new cycle of ownership consolidation (Desjardins, 2006; La presse cana-
dienne, 2006).

Conclusion
The configuration that characterized Québec journalism in the twentieth century
has not been replaced yet, but it has been severely rocked by the challenges facing
unionism in general (de-localization of industrial work in different countries, de-
massification of physical factories, etc.) and journalism in particular. The general
context in which unionism and journalism have been operating, especially in the
advanced societies including Canada, changed radically in the late years of the
twentieth century. The convergence of those changes could produce, when trans-
lated through actors’ actions and discourses, a global change of the configuration.
This article has shown that the specific references in Québec’s symbolic
environment, which gave vigour to the discourses of journalistic organizations,
have been losing strength without being replaced. New local conditions arise
within a context of global changes, whose effects we have not yet assessed. For
example, in the political sphere, the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989 ignited
a crisis in the nation-state system, challenging the legitimacy of sovereign fron-
tiers, symbolic as much as geographical. In the media industry, this has meant the
rise of a transnational level of television service (Demers, 2003a) and, in the
Québec/Canada case, a relative withdrawal by the national media from interna-
tional coverage. In the technological field, the expansion of the Internet has mul-
tiplied the number of media and consequently endangered traditional media such
as daily newspapers and generalist television networks. At the managerial level,
the Fordist paradigm has been replaced by the good employee model, character-
ized by dedication to the company and strong emotional involvement in the
success of the collective enterprise (Demers, 1989a). In economics, finance
capital is now the driving force: industries and commerce are sold, closed, cre-
at ed, or cut to pieces in an intense race for short-turn profits. This trend provoked,
for example, the wave of ownership concentration of the Canadian media at the
turn of the century (Demers, 2002a, 2003b). And from the cultural point of view,
the progress of the idea of democracy has spawned a preoccupation with indi-
individual emotions and minority rights, and a consequent withdrawal from the belief in collective action (Demers, 2002b).

In the preceding cycle, collective action, through the formula of unionism, created some representative organizations for Québec journalists. These organizations, directly linked to a media landscape dominated by monopolies or quasi-monopolies of dailies and generalist television networks, played a significant and stabilizing role in the configuration of journalism and its identity. Now, the needs of society for public free expression and information are increasingly being met by “new” media, which are largely non-unionized. Their skilled workers do not necessarily identify themselves as journalists or do not wish to integrate with the organized group. In coming years, the key concept for analyzing the evolution of collective action of Québec journalists will be repositioning in a new configuration of alliances and discursive strategies.

Notes
1. Le journaliste canadien-français, from which these quotes are sourced, was created by and for French-Canadian journalists in the 1920s. For a short history of this publication, see Le Cam, 2005, pp. 123 and 134.
2. At that time (in 1958), the UCJLF had 400 members: 320 of them were unionist; others were individual members (UCJLF, 1961).
3. Journalists were part of the unionist movement and took advantage of the broader context of improvement of working relationships and, in particular, of the 1964 reforms that established labour standards. This code facilitated unionization and recognized the right to strike of the public-sector workers (Dionne, 1991).
4. The UCJLF is not the only professional organization in Québec. Several associations have been created, including, for example l’Association professionnelle des employés de postes radiophoniques (for radio journalists) in 1951 (Demers, 1989a) as well as several journalistic clubs for women, English-speaking journalists, and so on.
5. Its website notes, for example : « Le rôle de notre fédération va donc devenir crucial à l’égard des travailleurs oeuvrant dans ces domaines puisque ceux-ci vont devoir de plus en plus faire face :
   à des frontières professionnelles mouvantes;
   à un marché de l’emploi volatile et exigeant;
   à des redéfinitions de tâches et à de nouveaux délais d’exécution;
   à des exigences de connaissances professionnelles de plus en plus pointues. » (La fédération nationale des communication, 2006)

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